

Servant of Dusk

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Original Work: Hämärän renki
Copyright © 2009 Sari Peltoniemi
Published by Tammi
218 pages

Sample translation by Owen F. Witesman and John C. Alleman
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Chapter 1

batrag

It is batrag to the Ugov line. It is their servant, has always been. For this was it made and conjured into being.

However, it is no machine nor a body without a spirit wandering mindlessly, fulfilling his master's wishes. It was created by the hand of Ugov, and that hand has such power that humans can never understand. A creation of that hand is subject only to his creator, because all others are weaker than him.

To it a human being is like a fly to the human himself. A droning and bustling about of the human are meaningless to it, and just as easily as a human swats a fly, it can swat a human. Only Ugovs have meaning for it. It does what they command, and that is the only thing that satisfies it. It exists for that alone

Chapter Two

Kaarina

Kaarina and Valéry had stopped the car at the side of a field, under the protection of some big spruce trees. They had driven all night and the next day. Valéry had stopped now and then to buy gas for the car's tank and for the spare can. Valéry had said that the farther they went, the less gasoline would be available, and eventually they might not be able to get any at all. Of course, it was not sold all over the place anywhere in the country, except perhaps in Helsinki, but car men like Valéry knew the places and knew how to stock up.

This was the first night that Kaarina and Valéry had spent together.

It was not like she had dreamed of.

She had thought that nothing could be more beautiful than to be able to nestle into Valéry's side. They would just be two together, with no one to reproach or warn. So Kaarina would be able to forget the nasty talk about Valéry for a moment and believe only what she herself knew to be true.

But everything else was forcing its way into her mind.

"What were Mother and Father thinking? How could they be so worried?" Father would raise a terrible ruckus in the village and take the Ugov estate to task. Mother would cry and mourn, praying and sitting at the window, waiting for Kaarina's form to appear in the yard.

And what about the Ugovs? What would they do when they noticed that their golden boy had left? The Ugovs could set off after him. Valéry had said that they would not, but Kaarina had noticed his hesitation. The hesitation was so small that no one else could have noticed it but Kaarina, who had watched Valéry for so long and learned his expressions— Kaarina, who had always stored Valéry's face in her mind when the opportunity arose and studied its every feature. In the monotonous routine of the shoe factory, Kaarina had been able to concentrate completely on her thoughts.

And of course Kaarina noticed how Valéry turned away a little too quickly.

"They're not interested enough in me," Valéry had claimed. Kaarina had wanted to believe it, but why were they fleeing then?

For there they were, on the way to somewhere. The two of them alone in the world.

Luckily, it was not freezing, so they stopped to spend the night in the car. It would, of course, have been terribly embarrassing to go ask for a place to spend the night with Valéry. What would people have thought of Kaarina?

Kaarina felt her cheeks flush, even though it was cool in the car. She was awfully tired, but sleep was still a long way off.

Valéry turned the car on from time to time and let it run for a moment, so the motor would not get too cold. He went outside occasionally, and Kaarina was not able to make out where he went. Valéry was restless too, but didn't seem at all tired.

“Just sleep in peace, buttercup,” Valéry had said. Kaarina wasn't even sure whether she wanted Valéry by her side. What if Valéry was rough and hateful? What if Kaarina started to have regrets?

When Kaarina finally fell asleep, she started to have a nightmare.

The landscape of her dream is harsher than Kaarina has ever seen. The sky is very high, pearl gray, and it allows the wind to whip the barren land. The leaves of the tiny trees resemble birch leaves; otherwise, the trees seem tormented and downtrodden. Nothing is able to rise up from the ground; it feels like a large palm is pressing Kaarina down as well.

Her burden already weighs so much. When she looks at it, she realizes that it is Valéry. He is unable to walk, but rather he lets Kaarina haul him around. Even though Kaarina is so weak and fragile and sensitive, she has to carry Valéry!

Kaarina knows that Valéry is in danger of dying, and that she should help him urgently. But what can she do in this place, where rocks determine the direction of her travel and no other people are visible anywhere?

Valéry looks at Kaarina like the old dog that Kaarina long ago led to her father to be shot. In the same way, he trusts in Kaarina and does not understand that there is no help to be had. The framework of rocks coils like a snake.

Kaarina would cry, but the wind does not allow that. It sucks the tears away and slaps her cheeks with its rough fingers.

Kaarina woke up. She knew that a noise had disturbed her.

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“Valéry!” she cried out, wiping her face. The wind had not made it this far to spoil Kaarina’s weeping, but otherwise the dream was still present.

Someone was knocking on the window of the car, and Valéry was nowhere to be seen.

Chapter Three

Kaarina

Kaarina carefully moved closer to the window and tried to see out.

“Who’s there?” she asked, so quietly that she could hardly hear herself.

An echo responded from outside, but much louder and more sharply than Kaarina.

“Who’s there?” What is the meaning of trespassing on people’s property without permission?”

The nearest houses along the road had been kilometers away, so that Kaarina and Valéry had believed they would be left alone. Perhaps the car had aroused so much attention that it was worth following after even late in the evening. There were so few cars, and no one had a car as fine and big as Valéry.

Did Kaarina dare open the door? The man sounded like a terrible bully, but an ordinary farmer nonetheless, and probably wasn’t even drunk.

“Why are people bothered like this? We have to set out in the middle of the night to see what’s going on in our fields.”

Kaarina did not understand what they could have been doing wrong, but she was ashamed, nevertheless. She opened the door and said,

“We’re really very sorry. We didn’t know that we would be a bother.”

The man’s mouth fell open when he saw Kaarina. Whatever he had expected, it obviously was not what he was seeing: a delicate girl who had been crying, a bright shining fairy.

The man was smaller and frailer than Kaarina had imagined judging from his voice.

“Who are you, and what are you doing on my land?” the man said, started up his harping again.

Kaarina tried to think about the situation carefully. If the Ugovs were after them, it would be best not to tell the truth. Still, their tracks would really have been all too easy to follow, because the car attracted too much attention. And if the car could be disregarded, its passengers always aroused notice when they had to stop among people. Kaarina had noticed that they were stared in an

unusually dumbfounded manner. She guessed that was due to Valéry's handsomeness and his dark, eastern countenance.

"I'm Helena, from a ways off down to the south."

Kaarina said it this way like the elderly and people from remote villages, not talking in kilometers. She thought that

it would arouse trust in the man. Helena was Kaarina's mother's name; the first name that came to her mind.

"I'm on my way to Helsinki with my brother Walter. Walter is going into the army there, and I'm going to be a maid for a family we know."

Kaarina realized that the story was not believable. Maids didn't ride in cars. When Valéry came back, the man would see immediately that they could not even be remote cousins, much less brother and sister. And why had she said they were going to Helsinki? In that case, they would have been driving in precisely the wrong direction.

"Is that so?" the man said, however, a little more calmly. "You can stay the night here, as long as you don't steal anything or damage the barn."

What could they have stolen? Kaarina hadn't even noticed any barn.

"We certainly won't. Thanks a lot. We'll be on our way when my brother has been able to rest a little."

The man peeked into the car.

"Nice toy. This kind is probably expensive."

Kaarina's head was buzzing. She could not come up with any reasonable explanation for having a car like this, so she was content just to nod.

"And where has this brother of yours been lurking? He hasn't been hunting rabbits on my land, has he?"

Kaarina laughed in a strained manner.

"Who would be hunting in the dark? We don't even have a rifle, and Mother made a fine picnic for us."

She showed the man the basket Valéry had packed, but she was careful not to show its contents too closely. No one had such wonderful delicacies. Kaarina had studied the bottles on the way, and she did not even recognize everything in them.

Just then, Valéry came out of the forest with a rabbit in his arms.

"You haven't slept at all," Kaarina said carefully as they drove in the middle of the pitch-black forest. Valéry snorted.

“I’ve never needed much sleep. You don’t need to worry.”

She wondered if she dared ask about the rabbit. Valéry would surely tell her without being asked, when he wanted to.

The landowner had gone into hysterics again when he noticed the rabbit. Valéry had dropped it to the ground immediately, and it had bounded away quite peacefully, but the landlord had jumped up and down and roared about how he wished he had brought his gun.

“I’ll pay for it, certainly.” Valéry had dug his wallet out of his coat pocket. But what would he have been paying for?

“I don’t want money from good-for-nothing layabouts!” the man had cried.

Valéry had calmly shrugged his shoulders and climbed behind the steering wheel.

Kaarina could hardly breathe she was in such shock.

“Don’t be afraid. It’s always like this on the road,” Valéry had said. Then, after a long silence,

“If you want, you can always go back home. I won’t force you to come with me.”

Kaarina had shaken her head.

“I swore an oath.”

“It was a promise, not an oath, and you couldn’t have known then what you were promising.”

“It was an oath, and I won’t break it, no matter what kind of weakling I was and how afraid I was. I ...”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

Kaarina had felt her cheeks burning—luckily it was dark—and sensed that Valéry was smiling. She had started to smile, too. What did it matter if some stupid hick complained? Valéry was hers.

Chapter Four

Kaarina

Kaarina had fallen asleep. When she opened her eyes, Valéry and she were still driving. It was snowing, and it felt cool in the car. Valéry glanced at her.

“Grab a blanket from the back seat. My wolfskin coat is there, too.”

Valéry’s fur coat was long and beautiful, but Kaarina had always avoided it for some reason. No one else had a coat like that. Valéry had used it when visiting the shoe factory on cold days, and Kaarina had a queer feeling when he did.

It seemed like wolves were still looking from between the hairs, even though they had been killed, skinned, and arranged into beautiful strips. As if Valéry himself were a wolf amongst the flock.

Kaarina took the wool blanket instead.

“Eat something and give me some too,” Valéry suggested. Kaarina took some bread from the basket. It seemed to have dried already, but it would do well enough. Soon, however, they would have to stop to buy new bread from some house or store.

There was no more water, but Valéry had saved several bottles of wine. He was used to drinking it, but Kaarina had never even tasted wine, much less enjoyed it with meals.

“When we stop, I’ll put snow in a container. It will melt in the car.”

Kaarina opened a few glass bottles. In one there was spiced fish, and in another small pieces of meat. She spread these onto pieces of bread.

Both tasted strong in Kaarina’s mouth, but she tried not to show it.

“Black porridge?” she wondered, studying another jar. “Has this one spoiled?”

Valéry laughed.

“It’s caviar, the finest of delicacies. Taste it!” Kaarina put a spoonful of black lumps in her mouth

and would have liked to spit it out immediately. It was as if she had eaten raw pike. How could this be the best delicacy?

She looked out, embarrassed, and lowered the basket to her feet. She was no longer hungry.

During the day, the snowstorm intensified, and driving became more and more difficult. Snow seemed to be rising from the road from one a single point in a dense whirlwind that drew your eyes to it like magic. The car's tires spun ever heavier and more reluctantly.

"We'll probably have to stop," Kaarina sighed, but Valéry didn't give up until late in the evening. By then, they had already stopped many times to dig the car out of the snow and managed to move forward another insignificant distance.

A side road had been plowed, and they turned onto it; a large house appeared shortly.

"If only we can pay to stay the night," Valéry hoped. There were many outbuildings around the house. "There's probably a car here,

too," Valéry guessed. "That would be good. I can probably get shelter for my own car here and get it warm so we can continue as soon as the snowstorm stops."

When they stepped out of the car, a side door of the house opened. A young woman with a scarf on her head looked out, and a spitz dog bounced out through the crack in the door. It ran straight at Valéry and started to bark demonically. Its shrill barking broke off, however, as if hitting a wall, and it started to whine and lay down on its stomach on the ground.

"What's wrong, Hupuli," the girl laughed. "He's starting to get a little senile."

But she continued to stare at Valéry—like all the girls, Kaarina thought. The woman did not seem to notice her at all.

Valéry petted the dog, which rolled over on its back, and the young woman curtsied quickly.

"Would the gentleman and lady like to come into the kitchen? Everyone's there now, eating. The master and mistress of the house always eat in the kitchen here. If the gentleman and lady would like food, there is sure to be plenty."

"No need to be so formal, we're just travelers," said Valéry. The girl glanced at the car and curtsied again. Kaarina started to laugh, and something strange came over her:

"We're only used to eating caviar, of course," she said.

Valéry turned to look at her, amazed, and the girl did not even seem to understand what she was talking about. The people in the kitchen fell silent when they stepped inside.

“The snowstorm surprised us,” Valéry said.

It was easy to pick out the master and mistress of the house from the group. Both were large and arrogant-looking, and neither rose to shake hands.

“Sit down. There’s soup and bread. You’re car people?”

“Indeed. Are you as well, sir?”

“I do have a little something out in the garage.” Kaarina started to feel a little more relaxed. The pea soup smelled

heavenly, and it was steaming hot. Best of all, in this house it seemed that introductions were unnecessary. Now they had a little more time to think about who they were and why they were traveling.

While they were eating, Kaarina heard a clink from a dark corner of the the farmhouse kitchen behind her, and turned to look. She had not noticed that a skinny young man was sitting there, separate from all the rest. He had dropped his spoon, and the others also turned to look.

“What is Fransu splashing about? He won’t have any more so good food isn’t wasted on the mice. Someone like him who doesn’t work doesn’t need much food.”

The youngster looked with large eyes at the master of the house. He seemed simple, if not a little crazy. The clothes he had on were the same as the others’, but his hair was extraordinarily long and gleaming blond.

The boy’s gaze turned to Kaarina. How could a person have such big eyes? And so bright blue that even in the twilight, they glistened like the surface of a lake.

Kaarina was startled when the boy winked and suddenly turned back to his plate.

“Fransu is just here like a leeching, although as far as I know, leeches aren’t welcome anywhere else these days,” the master laughed darkly. “At night, he sneaks off to the sauna. Don’t think I don’t know, Fransu. In the daytime, he sings to the girls in the cottage, and you can’t get any decent work out of him. Everything ...”

“Let it be while our visitors are here,” the mistress of the house hissed. “You can’t drive people onto the road in the middle of winter.”

Valéry cleared his throat.

“I’ll pay for the food, of course. I’ll also pay for a place to stay the night. If shelter can be arranged for the car, I’ll pay for that, too.”

“Very well,” said the master of the house. “We can surely agree on a price. Guests have no need to worry.”

The smile in the man’s voice worried Kaarina. Did he want something else besides money?”

Chapter Five

batrag

Among humans, it must assume human shape. It is clumsy and slow. In the forests at night, it howls and rages and rips trees out of the ground. If it could only reject this shell and travel of roads of the air, it would already have accomplished its task.

Now it must crawl on foot or on horseback, traveling every inch of road and babbling at people it encounters in the language of this country, which is so angular and toneless—like stones talking to one another.

It had to smile and flatter people and be whatever it had to be at any given time.

But why should it hurry? Its time would end only when its master decided, and he had no reason to give up his batrag.

Chapter Six

Kaarina

“Aliisa will make a pot of coffee and get a long loaf of sweet bread from the porch,” the mistress of the house said when they were finished eating. The servants glanced at each other, leading Kaarina to guess that in this house, coffee is not usually served after a meal, at least not for everyone and not on a weekday. But they could afford coffee—that was clear.

Aliisa carried a flowery coffeepot to the table and was about to take a cup to Fransu as well when the master of the house coughed. Aliisa turned in place and put the cup back on the shelf.

Fransu sighed loudly.

When Aliisa had served the coffee, the master of the house asked, at last:

“May I ask where you are traveling? And who are you, since you’re not from here, at least?”

“We’re from south of here, dozens of miles away,” Kaarina finally said when Valéry could not find any words to say.

“I’m going ... with my cousin ... to Kuopio.”

“Kuopio, really? In this weather? Couldn’t you have waited more till spring?” the mistress of the house wondered.

Kaarina bit her lower lip.

“We couldn’t wait. Our aunt is ill. Uncle died in the war, and now my aunt is alone with the children.”

“Oh, really? And couldn’t you get there by train? Why ...”

The mistress of the house would have continued her interrogation, but her husband interrupted.

“A car man travels by car, isn’t that right?” Valéry nodded his head enthusiastically.

Outside it was already dark. Aliisa had lit a few oil lamps. It was warm in the cottage, and Kaarina’s eyes started to drift closed. Then Fransu started to sing. He had a beautiful, high voice; it seemed strange for a man to sing with such a voice.

Kaarina had never heard such a song before either. It was a long, sorrowful ballad, telling about a rich girl name Maria and poor man named Jacob. Maria’s

father would not agree to their union, and Maria was promised to another man.

*The wedding party went to seek
the bride across the moors so bleak,
but all their searching was in vain,
no trace could be found on heath or plain.
Yet before a week had passed
Jacob and Maria were found at last
drowned together in the lake,
bound with ties that none could break.
Maria is laid to rest in whitest gown,
cold, bedecked with bridal crown, Fransu's song ended.
See Maria now, cold, bedecked with bridal crown.*

Kaarina felt his gaze on her neck, but she did not turn to look. She was sure that the song was meant for her and Valéry. What did Fransu think he knew? He was probably just jesting at their expense. People had been jealous of Kaarina and Valéry before. Nevertheless, the song unsettled her. Was it so clear that Valéry was the son of a factory owner and Kaarina a shoe packager from the factory line?

Aliisa wiped her eyes with a corner of her apron.

“Why does Fransu sing things like that?” the mistress of the house said reproachfully, her voice breaking. The men tried to chuckle, and the master of the house seemed disgusted.

“He’s been this way every evening, the whole fall. As if we were holding a funeral before going to bed.”

“That’s not true! Fransu sings happy songs, too,” Aliisa cried, but she immediately put her hand to her mouth and blushed. The mistress of the house also seemed to be blushing. The women of the house seemed to be somewhat infatuated, although Fransu was clearly younger than the mistress of the house, almost a boy still.

They made a bed for Kaarina in an alcove of the cottage kitchen, and Valéry was put up in the hired man’s room.

“I’m going to go check on the car again,” said Valéry. He stayed so long that Kaarina had managed to nod off before he returned.

“Is everything all right?” Kaarina awoke when Valéry walked through the room.

Valéry mumbled something unclear. The dog ran after him and was also making noise, but much more enthusiastically.

“Good night! We’ll probably be able to continue on in the morning,” Kaarina said. Valéry did not reply.

We can continue on, Kaarina thought, but to where? Valéry had talked about it vaguely and evasively, and Kaarina had thought that they would talk about it in more detail along the way. At first it was only important to get started quickly so they could be far away before Kaarina’s parents and the Ugovs noticed their absence.

Only then did it enter Kaarina’s mind that her father might even alert the police. He might do it even if the Ugovs forbade it. Would Father dare? He had always obeyed the factory owner humbly, fearing him like all the others, but now his daughter was involved.

I’ll have to write a letter home, Kaarina realized, first thing in the morning. And she should write another letter to Omena, who she called Oona, who had been her friend in the factory. Oona could calm her mother and father down. Oona knew that Valéry was not like the other Ugovs. Oona could convince Kaarina’s father that there was no need alerting the police.

Kaarina had often thought about Oona. She was so different from all others, energetic and brave, not seeming to fear the Ugovs at all. She did not even care about the factory guard, whose very shadow made Kaarina shiver.

Oona sometimes talked in a funny way. They had claimed she came from Turku originally.

Viljo, the factory’s oldest, or at least its wisest man, had hinted to Kaarina that Oona was from much farther away. Kaarina had understood that Viljo did not mean Rovaniemi or Hanko, but somewhere even more remote and exotic.

Maybe they were on their way there?

Valéry had talked about the sea, but in that case, they should have gone west or south. Now they were headed east and northeast.

Valéry had also mentioned the archipelago and some old lands his family owned.

They had to talk this over openly. Kaarina would demand firmly that no secrets should be kept.

“I’m no Fransu!”

Kaarina turned around, alarmed. She had nestled into the alcove and had her back to the room. She had heard no steps or the opening of the door.

Now Fransu was standing right next to her and was almost shouting.

“My name is Frans Knight.”

“Is that so?” Kaarina said, carefully, pulling the covers up to her ears.

“I just wanted to say that. What is your name, pretty lady?”

“Kaarina,” she said automatically.

“Where are you traveling to?”

“Kuopio. I already said that.”

“Where are you really going?” Frans whispered, but he continued, “You don’t have to answer. I can already see that you can’t. I’ll ask your boyfriend tomorrow.”

“You mean my brother,” Kaarina attempted, but Frans only grinned.

“Wasn’t he your cousin just this afternoon? Don’t worry, I won’t tell the others. I just have to know. I can’t stand secrets, and that’s why I figure them all out. Always.”

Frans sounded frightening, and Kaarina was even more sure that the young man was a little nuts. Knight? What kind of name was that? He probably invented it himself.

“I’ll go now. Sleep in peace, princess. If the master comes to bother you, call Frans to help.”

He laughed and giggled as he went, but Kaarina still couldn’t really be sure whether to be afraid of the master of the house or whether Frans was just joking.

Chapter Seven

Kaarina

The next day, there was such a storm raging that they could not even think of continuing their journey. It did not seem to bother the people of the house at all.

Everyone watched, dumbfounded, how even the house cat became Valéry's friend. At their first meeting, it rolled over onto its back and hissed at him, bristling, but that only lasted a moment. Then it seemed to wake from a dream. It started to walk around Valéry's feet and purr intensely. Finally, it climbed forcibly into Valéry's arms.

Valéry smiled uncomfortably.

"The animals are strange in your company," Aliisa smiled. "Best if you don't go in the barn."

Kaarina asked the mistress of the house for writing materials and prepared messages to her home and to Oona.

To her mother and father, she wrote only a few lines. She asked her parents not to worry. *"I'll come back soon. I just have to take care of some things first,"* she promised. Perhaps it was a false promise, but without it, they would not be able to bear this at home.

To Oona, she was able to tell a little more.

✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂

My dear friend, Oona,

When you get this letter, I will already be far from home. You know well enough who I left with.

I'm more frightened than you can imagine. I thought that leaving would make me a different Kaarina right away. I thought that when I had made such a big and bold decision, everything would become clearer.

I would like to be like you. You dared to come to the dances with that giant, Jari, even though everyone stared at you and mocked you. You dared to say at the factory that we should have proper food breaks.

I don't dare continue on Valéry, but I'm even more afraid to leave him on his own and return home.

I don't know what I'm afraid of. Sometimes in the night I wake up knowing that I should be more afraid. In the morning it feels stupid, but it still bothers me.

If only I could talk to you. I'm sure you could give me advice, unless you're angry with me for leaving.

Think of me there at home. Take care of Mother and Father and see that they don't do anything foolish.

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

Kaarina added at the end of the letter, "I'm sure we'll meet again soon," but then she crossed out that sentence with smudged lines. She didn't have to lie to Oona.

She wrote the addresses on the envelopes with care when no one else could see and put the letters in her pocket. She would buy stamps later from some post office along the way.

Her mind already felt lighter from writing the letters.

Aliisa was toiling away early in the morning in the barn helping with the milking, then in the kitchen. From time to time, she would run to get something from the outside storage or the porch. The mistress of the house did not appear in the cottage.

Valéry and the master of the house were looking at the cars. Frans was probably there too, since he did not do any work.

"I'll help you," Kaarina promised, and a bucketful of potatoes was placed in front of her.

"Your cousin is ever so handsome," Aliisa smiled. "Does he have a fiancée?"

"Yes!" Kaarina exclaimed. Aliisa was so shocked that she dropped her knife.

Kaarina hurried to start explaining:

"A girl is waiting for him in our home village. Val... Walter will marry her next summer."

“Oh, really? Well, that figures,” Aliisa sighed, but she was soon smiling again. She had clearly gone a long time without someone to talk with, because her words came out in an uninterrupted flow. Kaarina only had to nod a little and answer occasional questions. They were not as irritating as the first one, and Kaarina was able to bury herself in her own thoughts.

She only woke from her reverie when Aliisa offered her a coarse overcoat.

“Let’s go, then.”

“OK, let’s go.”

Kaarina didn’t dare ask where. Aliisa had surely just explained that. Had she said something about a storeroom?

The storm wind tore the handle of the outer door out of Aliisa’s hand and flung the door against the wall. Snow was flying around the yard so thick that she could hardly make out the buildings on the other side. The trip across the yard felt like an interminable struggle. They had to cover their faces with scarves so the tiny snow needles could not sting them. For a moment, Kaarina was almost sure that some living being was pulling her by the shoulders and trying to make her fall into the snow.

The door of the storeroom was stuck, but Aliisa didn’t give up. She pulled and pulled, they finally got into the dimly lit space.

“Out here are just some big pieces of meat that don’t fit on the porch, and flour and other things like that.”

She started to gather the things she needed, and Kaarina looked around. Only a little light come in through the small window opening, but her eyes were already used to the gloom.

The granary was full of things, as suited a house like this, of course. Kaarina looked at the beams and the containers, and then she noticed something peculiar in one corner.

“Aliisa! Come look!”

“What’s that? It looks like a rabbit.” Aliisa picked up a white furry bundle from the floor.

“It’s a rabbit, all right, and its neck has been bitten through. How do you hunt in this house?” Kaarina teased.

“This had to be Messe’s doing, but how did he get in here? Could he have forced himself through some crack? But then how could he have brought the rabbit with him? Such a big bunny rabbit!”

The rabbit's bloody neck started to disgust Kaarina. She turned her head away.

Kaarina had hardly seen Valéry the whole day. She was already starting to miss him. They were supposed to be able to talk just the two of them.

"Let's hope tomorrow will be clear and the main roads will be plowed. We'll head out immediately," Valéry whispered to Kaarina in the evening before they went to bed. Valéry seemed agitated, but so was Kaarina after all. It would not be good to get stuck in this house for a long time.

What if the master of the house were to come that night and suggest something? Kaarina had noticed sure enough how he stared at her at the dinner table. Or what if Frans were to appear again stealthily and go off again with his weird stories?

Kaarina fell asleep, restlessly, but she was able to sleep until morning without disturbing the others. She was the first to look outside: it was still dark, but at least the snow was not pounding against the window.

The grandfather clock struck five times, and Kaarina began to expect Aliisa entering the kitchen. But Frans came instead. He had bound his shiny hair at his neck. It looked like it had just been washed.

"This is a good day to leave," he said. "The road has already been plowed, and your boyfriend has been keeping the car warm all night.

"Good then," said Kaarina, carefully. "We've been quite a bother."

"Just the opposite. You've been good for the house."

Frans's voice sounded tense, and he laughed between speaking.

"The master of the house doesn't intend to ask for any money for keeping you." Kaarina sat up quickly, astonished.

"That's kind. I just thought ..."

"You thought the master is a miser. Well, he is. That's why he intends to propose that you take me along and deposit me in some faraway place."

How could she answer Frans without offending him? Kaarina knew that they could not give anyone a ride. Their route and their goal were so unclear, and they could not discuss them with anyone listening. The journey was Kaarina's and Valéry's journey, secret and perhaps dangerous as well.

"You aren't answering," Frans complained. "You don't want me along, but you won't be given a choice. It's best to get used to the idea. Maybe I can be of some help to you."

“How do you know that the master intends to demand such a thing? You can probably stay here, if you want.”

It was clear from Frans’s face that he didn’t want to stay.

“You shouldn’t think that I’m taking advantage of this house. The truth is that this house is taking advantage of me. The master won’t permit it any longer, and that’s fine with me. I said that I find out all secrets, and it wasn’t hard to figure this one out. Do you hear how the mistress weeps?”

No matter how Kaarina strained her ears, she didn’t hear any crying.

It became clear, however, that Frans had been right.

After breakfast, Valéry took his wallet from this coat pocket.

“How much to I own you? I would also like to buy some bread and milk for the road, if that’s all right.”

“That’s fine, and it won’t cost anything,” the master of the house said. The mistress of the house got up from the table, nodded goodbye, and left.

“I’m willing to pay.”

“If you absolutely have to, then you could do me a little favor.”

Kaarina tried to attract Valéry’s attention by wrinkling the corners of her mouth and shaking her head, but he did not notice her signals.

“Of course, we’ll do whatever you ask,” Valéry promised.

“Fransu here needs get to Kuopio, and he doesn’t have money for a train ticket. He could ride in the back seat, since you’re going in that direction.”

Valéry’s expression was so flabbergasted that Kaarina could not help but smile.

“It’s impossible,” Valéry was finally managed to spit out.

“Is that so? I would have thought that it would have been good for you, too. Frans would have been able to sing on the way. There wouldn’t be anyone singing here, either, even if someone were to ask. We hardly ever see such handsome cousins, especially traveling in such a beautiful car.”

The master was blackmailing them! Valéry seemed more dumfounded than before, but then he nodded.

“Maybe he would fit in the car, after all.”

Frans immediately jumped up and started to sing an obscene ditty. Aliisa blushed as she wrapping loaves of bread in wax paper.

Chapter Eight

Kaarina

Aliisa had come to the gate to say goodbye, but no one else was to be seen. She stayed at the gate, waving her scarf, and Frans waved back, until they turned onto a bigger road and the house disappeared behind the spruce trees.

It seemed to Kaarina that they had already been traveling for a long time. They had only left a few days ago, however, and they couldn't be very far from home.

On the night before they left, Valéry had come to her window, and he had been completely different than ever before. He had always been calm, sure, and stylish, but that night his hair hung loose, his eyes were bloodshot, and his speech was a sobbing, slurred mess.

He had crawled up a ladder to Kaarina's room and sat down on the bed next to her.

How many years had they been warning Kaarina about Valéry? "He's devious and malicious, just like his whole family! At first he'll treat you nicely, but then he'll turn evil when you least expect! You don't understand what evil is, little Kaarina; you have to protect yourself."

Her family and all the older workers had sung the same gloomy tune whenever Valéry visited the factory, even if he had not talked to Kaarina.

Of course, Valéry's family, all the Ugovs, were strange and somewhat creepy, even in all their beauty. They had always treated the workers in their factor and the villagers coldly—it had been hinted to Kaarina that she had not even been told the worst of the Ugovs' deeds and that she would never be told.

Then there was the factory guard, about whom Kaarina did not have to be warned. She was afraid of him without any warnings. What kind of a guard could he be when hardly anything was ever seen of him but the odd shadow? Who, nevertheless, made people fear and obey the foremen so humbly that there could not be such meekness in any other factory in all of Finland?

In spite of all this, Kaarina did not hesitate when Valéry asked:

"Will you come with me? I'm leaving everything behind and starting a new life."

Kaarina had always known that Valéry was different. You could see it in his eyes, if you just wanted to look properly. It also showed in the way Valéry

treated Kaarina. Valéry had never behaved patronizingly or insultingly toward her. He had never ordered Kaarina around or forced her, although he could have.

Of course, Kaarina had thought about her mother and father. They were already old, and Kaarina was the most important thing in the world to them. But she had to answer:

“I will go, and I swear that I will always be with you and help you in whatever you want to do.

It had sounded a little too solemn, but Valéry had calmed down immediately. They had sat for a moment facing each other, holding each other tightly.

Then Kaarina had quickly packed some things into a suitcase and written a short message to her parents.

“Don’t mind me,” Frans said, after they had driven some distance in silence.

“I already know almost all your secrets, so you can talk in peace.”

Valéry glanced at Kaarina questioningly. She shrugged her shoulders.

“I just can’t figure out where you’re actually going. You would think a young couple would hurry to the south, if they wanted to marry secretly and set up house together.”

“We’re on our way to Kuopio, as you well know. That’s where you want to go, too.”

A laugh rang out from the back seat.

“I’m on my way to wherever you are, so you don’t need to fetch up to Kuopio. Just drive straight to where you’re really going.”

Valéry snorted, but didn’t argue. Irritation flashed across his face.

They stopped in a little village with a church to mail Kaarina’s letters. She bought two stamps from the postmistress. There was a picture of former president Svinhufvud on them.

Valéry got gasoline from the store. He filled the car’s tank and bought yet another spare canister.

It was quiet in the village. An old man was in front of the store with his horse, and he stared at them openly.

When Frans pointed to the sky with his finger; the old man also looked upward.

“That sure is a big bird,” said Frans. “Or else a flying lizard. I would have thought they were hibernating.”

Kaarina had seen flying lizards only rarely and from a distance, but her father had talked about them from time to time. In her father’s opinion, flying lizards could move about in both summer and winter. In Viljo’s opinion—and Viljo was a former teacher, after all—flying lizards had to be cold-blooded, just like the water lizards. They could not move in the cold, instead spending the winter in hibernation.

Something in the sky was flying north now, however, and it was not a crow or even a raven. It could be an eagle, but its wings seemed larger than an eagle’s.

Seeing a flying lizard had always caused a strange melancholy in Kaarina. That feeling came over her now. She was so small, and her journey now an awkward struggle as a prisoner of the land.

Perhaps Frans felt the same, for he again started singing a sad song. This time it told about a ghost that came knocking on the door of girl named Marjaana.

The ghost was Marjaana’s fiancé, Wilhelm, who had died far away in a foreign land and now wanted to fulfill the oath he had sworn to Marjaana.

*The cock crowed and the clock struck
as the day brightened,
then the sighing ghost also
disappeared into the darkness.
Marjaana rose from her bed,
put her clothes on,
and a star fell from heaven
and ended her life.
Thus it happened as was promised,
and they are together now,
and Wilhelm is not forced to
spend his time alone in sadness.*

Servant of Dusk

“Maybe they are together,” Kaarina repeated to herself. In the song, they were still together after death. Had Kaarina herself promised that? She remembered a dream in which she had dragged a dying Valéry out of a circle of stones.

The flying lizard—or whatever it was—could still be distinguished, but now only a distant speck in the bright sky.